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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE
AN OPPORTUNITY IS LOST

by

William P. LaChance
LTC, U.S. Army

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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23 October 2009

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
SCOPE OF STUDY	2
A STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE	2
THE HUMANITARIAN CIVIC ACTION PROGRAM	7
THE UNBRIDLED BUREAUCRACY	8
CONCLUSION	11
RECOMMENDATIONS	12
NOTES	16
BIBLIOGRAPHY	19

ABSTRACT

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE: AN OPPORTUNITY IS LOST

The literature is replete with inspiring stories of ~~successful~~ humanitarian missions (HA). The missions alleviate pain and sufferings, and if only in the short term, better the community they serve; but do these missions fully support the geographic combatant commander's (GCC) theater security cooperation plans (TSCP)? An objective analysis indicates the United States' humanitarian assistance programs lack strategic vision, effective interagency coordination, adequate funding, and responsiveness; and therefore, do not fully support the GCC's TSCP. This paper evaluates the strategic benefits and opportunities of HA. It also examines the development of the GCC's Humanitarian Civic Action program and the effectiveness of the Department of Defense–Department of State interagency relationship. Based upon the research presented, the author draws conclusions and provides specific recommendations to improve HA's linkage to and support of the GCC's TSCP.

INTRODUCTION

Lacking strategic vision, proper coordination, adequate funding, unity of effort, and encumbered by bureaucracy, the United States' humanitarian assistance (HA) efforts are not fully leveraged in support of theater security cooperation plans (TSCP): An opportunity is lost.

The literature is replete with inspiring stories of ~~successful~~ humanitarian missions. Following a similar pattern, the stories chronicle the deep emotional impact on both provider and recipient, and as if to quantify success, provide tally of goods and services provided. These missions alleviate pain and sufferings, and if only in the short term, better the community they serve; but are they fully successful? Do they fully support the geographic combatant commander's (GCC) strategic initiatives? This author argues that current HA programs do not fully support the GCC's strategic engagement strategies. More specifically, the synchronization of HA programs, executed almost exclusively by the Department of State (DOS), with the GCC's TSCP, falls victim to a nonexistent interagency process. The resulting lack of shared vision and unity of effort, impedes the GCC's ability to maximize the goodwill and trust resulting from a well-planned HA strategy. In addition, the Department of Defense's (DOD) HA program is bureaucratic, and encumbered by restrictive statutory provisions and inadequate funding. In the end, current HA programs are not as successful as they could be, and an opportunity is lost.

SCOPE OF STUDY

While disaster and emergency response programs convey many of the same benefits of deliberate HA programs, they cannot be considered a reliable tool in the shaping of the strategic environment. Therefore, foreign disaster relief/emergency response programs conducted under the authority of 10 United States Code (USC) 402/2561 will not be addressed in this analysis. Instead, this paper focuses on humanitarian and civic assistance provided in conjunction with military operations as authorized by 10 USC 401. Department of Defense Directive 2205.02 governs DOD implementation of 10 USC 401; Among the directives' provisions are instructions which limit humanitarian civic action to minimal cost projects performed in conjunction with authorized military training in foreign countries. The directive further requires that humanitarian civic action projects be incorporated into the GCC's TSCP.¹ As a point of clarification, one should note the DOD's assistance program is entitled humanitarian civic assistance (HCA), while the DOS' program is entitled HA. Though the programs share somewhat similar names, they are significantly different. In terms of size, scope, and authority, the DOS' HA program dwarfs the DOD's HCA program. However, for brevity and clarity, unless specified, this study considers the term HA to be inclusive of both HA and HCA programs.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE: A STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE

The argument that HA efforts are not fully leveraged in support of the GCC's TSCP is predicated upon one's understanding and acceptance of HA as a unique tool that can aid the GCC's efforts to build bilateral relationships in support of a more effective TSCP. A low threat,

cost-effective operation, HA is a purveyor of goodwill and trust to the populace and governments supported. The trust relationship between host nation and the HA mission providers can serve as a bridge spanning the barriers to greater cooperation and engagement on strategically important programs and issues. Humanitarian assistance knows no religion, ethnicity, cultural qualification or boundaries. In its truest sense, HA is a gift of hope and compassion that positively impacts those in need on a deeply personal level. The methods and metrics to assess the benefits and performance of HA activities is a source of continued debate.² For the purpose of this analysis, public opinion will serve as the metric of performance.

An August 2006 public opinion poll in Indonesia—the world’s most populace Muslim country—assessed the residual goodwill toward the United States nearly two years after the 2004 tsunami relief. The survey found 30% of the population continued to have a favorable opinion of the United States.³ The result, down from the 44% favorability rating immediately following relief efforts, was still double the 15% favorability rating a 2003 survey found. During the same period, support within Indonesia for Osama Bin Laden dropped from 58% in 2003 to 12% in the 2006 survey.⁴ The authors of the survey noted, “The fact that almost two years after American help, Indonesians continue to appreciate America’s role is stunning proof of the sustained power of positive and substantial assistance to radically change Muslim public opinion.”⁵ Studies conducted in Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Pakistan all noted similarly strong public support as result of HA activities.⁶ Lee Hamilton, Co-Chair of the 9/11 commission and Iraq study group, in reviewing the Nigerian survey noted, “[The] survey of Nigerian opinion reinforces a lesson that America has learned in places as diverse as Pakistan and Indonesia: in the struggle against extremism, the effective and targeted use of U.S. assistance can be as effective—if not more effective—than the deployment of bombs and guns. To win the war of ideas and to combat the

swelling turmoil around the world, the United States must use all aspects of American power—including the power of American generosity.”⁷

Humanitarian Assistance, when combined with the other elements of national power, can also be a powerful tool in the stabilization of fragile states. Recent history has shown that fragile states can become host to criminal and terrorist networks that seek to incite regional instability.⁸ A strategic security issue of growing concern, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) identified fragile states as one of the most significant threats to U.S. security.⁹ The strength of the state is a direct result of the government’s capacity and willingness to provide for the basic needs of its populace.¹⁰ Failing to provide basic needs is inherently destabilizing, and if left unmet, can be a causal factor in the delegitimization of the government.¹¹ Perhaps the best means to evaluate the potential of HA to aid stabilization efforts is to consider the effect HA may have in mitigating the causes of fragile states. This study utilizes the twelve indicators of failing states, as established by the Fund for Peace, as basis for analysis. Of the twelve indicators, six are mitigated by well-planned HA strategies. The indicators include mounting demographic pressure, massive movement of refugees or internally displaced persons creating complex humanitarian emergencies, uneven economic development along group lines, sharp and/or severe economic decline, criminalization, and delegitimization of the state. Mounting demographic pressures refers to changes in population density and dispersion; and corresponding impacts upon cultural, economic, religious, and sustenance aspects of society. Of particular note in the definition are the food and life sustaining capacity impacts. A well-planned HA operation can help alleviate emergent food and life sustenance concerns until more permanent developmental solutions can be undertaken. The immediacy by which food aid can be delivered has proven effective in combating the rise of extremist organizations.¹² According to the USAID, “Food

aid] served as an effective entry point for promoting peace, especially among Indonesia's urban poor, who are often recruited by extremist groups using cash payments to encourage participation in street protests.”¹³ Movement of refugees and/or internally displaced persons—voluntarily or involuntarily—resulting in humanitarian emergency, can be a source of unrest. The USAID example in Indonesia demonstrates HA's ability to resolve humanitarian crisis and provide a calming influence to the disenfranchised. A sharp decline in support and trust for the government is often the result of gaps in that government's capacity.¹⁴ In those situations, HA may have a role in supporting the host government. Properly planned, so as to place the host nation in a leading role, HA support is likely to translate to increased support and legitimacy of the host government. In the face of economic crisis, HA, like the examples noted above, can aid in averting humanitarian crisis and potential social strife. Humanitarian assistance is a tool, among many, to fill capacity gaps and avert crisis of a failing state while issues of development and reform are undertaken. Navy Captain Jim Rice, Commander USNS *Mercy*, believes the USNS *Mercy*'s humanitarian mission helps stabilize countries and, therefore, reduces the possibility that those nations will serve as sanctuary for terrorist organizations. According to Captain Rice, “[HA] has a big benefit for our overarching national strategic objectives.”¹⁵ General James Jones, then Commander, United States European Command, viewed theater security cooperation programs like HA as the most effective means to avert costly wars and protect the United States from growing terrorist threats.¹⁶

Some argue assistance efforts offers little to no long-term benefit.¹⁷ Notwithstanding the results of the aforementioned Indonesian survey, this argument has some merit when viewed from a purely tactical level. At the tactical level, HA results are confined to the limits of the mission assigned. Evaluation of tactical HA discounts the operational impacts and is analogous

to declaring war's victory or defeat based on the outcome of a minor engagement. The true benefit of HA is not found in the singularity of one mission, but in the result of repeated engagement. Others argue HA actually has a negative impact upon the host nation and population served as it supplants host capability and creates dependency.¹⁸ Absent appropriate end state analysis and parallel planning with development efforts, HA may do more harm than good over the long term.¹⁹ Care must be taken to ensure that HA objectives are nested with long-term development efforts. It's also argued that, while not refuting the benefits of HA, the DOD should not encroach upon the roles of other agencies to assume greater roles in HA.²⁰ An issue recognized by the DOD, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates called for, "Dramatic increases in spending on the civilian instruments of national power."²¹ Opponents argue an expansion of the DOD's role in HA runs the risk of perceived militarization of U.S. assistance programs.²² This author shares these concerns and finds no cause to refute. Serious consideration must be given to the potential impacts of expanding military roles in HA to avoid placing a military face on U.S. aid efforts that could unwittingly undermine U.S. strategic interests.

Some may argue that HA should serve humanitarian needs and should not be considered in a strategic context. This argument is acknowledged, however, the purely peaceful affects of HA cannot be summarily dismissed on the basis of perceived ethical conflicts. The GCC's application of HA builds trust, stabilizes fragile states and increases bilateral cooperation. In short, HA is a tool that aids the GCC in the prevention of conflict. If HA reduces the probability of conflict's loss of life and destruction of property, it has the potential to serve a greater good and reduce potentially greater suffering than a purely humanitarian focused program.

DEVELOPING THE GEOGRAPHICAL COMBATANT COMMANDER'S HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The GCC's HA program is overly focused on tactical-level execution and is unresponsive to rapid changes in assigned geographic AORs. The program's challenges stem from an overly bureaucratic development and execution process. A review of this process demonstrates the challenges the program must overcome to be most effective.

The development of the GCC's HCA program is an eighteen month process that begins and ends with the embassy's country team. The country team's military group (MILGRP), in concert with local civic leaders, formulates a list of potential civic action projects. The projects are evaluated at the embassy level to ensure consistency with mission objectives and prioritized before forwarding to the appropriate geographic combatant command headquarters. The GCC's humanitarian civic assistance management official collates and reviews the HCA project nominations of all the embassies in the GCC's area of responsibility (AOR). The projects then receive a technical review through the appropriate staff representative depending upon the nature of the project. Projects successfully completing technical review are, per DOD Directive 2205.02, incorporated into the GCC's TSCP. This process yields a prioritized list of proposed projects which are forwarded to the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) for final review and approval.²³ The DSCA, the DOD's agency responsible for the management the DOD's security cooperation programs, collates and reviews HCA nominations from all the GCCs to determine legal sufficiency and compliance with applicable regulations. Approved projects are placed in priority and evaluated against available funding levels. Humanitarian civic assistance programs are funded with the Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid (OHDCA) appropriation which has a two year period of availability. Projects above the funding

cut line are certified for funding and returned to the GCC for execution.²⁴ The GCC evaluates and reprioritizes approved projects using the TSCP, the global plan for the deployment of forces, and the funds availability period. Absent from the process, is any strategic guidance from the GCC.²⁵ This fact, in effect, makes the GCC's regional HCA strategy nothing more than amalgamation of tactically focused MILGRP project proposals from across the AOR.

The DOD's small HCA budget places significant limits on the GCC's program capacities. In fiscal year 2008, the DSCA received a total of \$77.9 million in OHDA funding to support the entirety of the DOD's HCA programs.²⁶ This amount represents less than .05% of the DOS's \$1.6 billion HA budget for the same period.²⁷ For fiscal year 2010 the DSCA has submitted a budget request for \$84.6 million or just \$14.1 million per geographic combatant command to support a total of 703 MILGRP generated projects.²⁸

THE UNBRIDLED BUREAUCRACY

A dysfunctional interagency process impedes coordination and synchronization of HA activities across government agencies to achieve a synergistic effect in support of the GCC's TSCP. Joint publication 3-57, Civil-Military Operations, notes, ~~Interagency~~ coordination processes tend to be bureaucratic and diffused, inhibiting the concentration of power within a small or select group of agencies."²⁹ The reasons for interagency inefficiency are organizational, cultural, and political in nature. This discussion, while confined to the DOD-DOS interagency relationship, highlights reoccurring challenges across the interagency.³⁰ One should note, the USAID—the executive agent for U.S. HA programs—is a subordinate organization of the DOS. The DOD and the DOS are large, highly complex bureaucracies organized predominately along

functional lines. Like all other government agencies, they compete for resources, prestige, and ultimately influence within the government. The competitive rivalry may serve the political ambitions of agency leadership, but does little to synchronize, and thus enhance the overall effectiveness of U.S. HA programs, and has a direct impact upon the ability of the United States to effectively employ all the elements of national power. As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice noted, “More and more, solutions to the challenges we face lie not in the narrow expertise of one agency acting in one country, but in partnerships among multiple agencies working creatively together to solve common problems across entire regions.”³¹

Resolving the pitfalls of the current interagency goes well-beyond structural alignments and political ambition. In his 1998 essay *Defense is from Mars State is from Venus*; Colonel Rickey Rife lightheartedly defines the clash of the DOD’s and the DOS’ cultures.³² Colonel Rife describes the duty-bound, uniform-clad, well-organized, professionally-disciplined and structure oriented culture of the DOD in direct contradiction to the unstructured, intellectually-minded, informal, undisciplined, and indecisive culture of the DOS.³³ An issue further complicating the DOD–DOS relationship, is the misalignment of authority and resources.³⁴ The DOS, ostensibly responsible for engagement efforts inherent to U.S foreign policy, lacks the budgetary and personnel resources to adequately fulfill engagement requirements.³⁵ The DOD, on the other hand, possesses significant budgetary and personnel resources, but lacks the authorities to act on many engagement activities.³⁶ Mr. David Kilcullen, former DOS strategist and pentagon special advisor, placed the DOS’ and the DOD’s capacities in stark contracts when he said, “The U.S. armed forces employ about 1.68 million uniformed members. By comparison, the State Department employs about 6,000 Foreign Service officers, while the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has about 2,000. In other words, the Department of Defense

is about 210 times larger than USAID and State combined—there are substantially more people employed as musicians in Defense bands than in the entire foreign service.”³⁷

Another point of divergence is planning capacity. The DOD, with its cadre of professionally developed planners, dwarfs the limited planning capacities of the DOS.³⁸ The DOS, on the other hand, has very limited planning capacity making it incapable of planning far beyond current operations.³⁹ In an attempt to overcome the planning deficiencies and enhance interagency coordination, the GCCs formed Joint Interagency Coordination Groups (JIACG). The JIACG were intended to be the forum for increased interagency coordination, but as Dr. Charles Perry, director of Studies at the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, writes, “[The JIACGs have] met with limited success so far, partly because relatively few qualified personnel from non-DOD agencies and organizations are trained and available to participate in JIACG planning sessions.”⁴⁰ Expressing frustration, one GCC planner noted, “It’s awfully hard to promote interagency coordination when the people attending the interagency meetings are almost all DOD personnel.”⁴¹ Lacking both similarity and familiarity, the DOD and the DOS operate as ‘stovepipe’ organizations in pursuit of their own goals.⁴²

The challenges noted above manifest themselves within the HCA and HA programs. Interagency coordination of the HCA program is limited to activities at the country team level.⁴³ The DOD’s HCA, as managed by DSCA, is not synchronized with USAID HA efforts or any other government agencies.⁴⁴ The same is true of USAID’s coordination with DOD. Aside from disaster response programs—a topic beyond the scope of this study—there are no formal coordination mechanisms linking DOD and USAID.⁴⁵ To fully appreciate the sheer magnitude of opportunities lost by this lack of coordination, one should consider that for fiscal year 2008, the USAID provided over \$1.6 billion in HA worldwide.⁴⁶

CONCLUSIONS

A review of the research presented in this study yields several notable conclusions. First, HA, evaluated within the confines of existing performance criteria, is proven to be an effective tool in shaping the strategic environment. In addition, HA can, when employed with other elements of national power, aid in the stabilization of fragile states. Second, HA missions should be carefully planned and coordinated in parallel with developmental efforts to avoid supplanting local capacities and creating dependency. Third, the ability of DOD to significantly increase HCA efforts is limited by statute and perception. The restrictions set forth in 10 USC 401 limiting DOD to minimal cost projects performed in conjunction with other military missions limits the GCC's ability to expand HCA programs. Expansion of the DOD's participation into HA related activities could also be perceived by foreign nations as a militarization of U.S. aid programs and undermine U.S. strategic interests. Fourth, the development of the GCC's HCA program is a bureaucratic, bottom-up approach which makes the program both unresponsive to a changing environment and overly focused on the tactical level execution. Lacking strategic guidance, the bottom-up development process effectively places the success of the entire program at the country team level, where individual initiative can be the difference between success and failure. If embassy officials are engaged, they are likely to have a very active HA engagement strategy, the opposite is also true. Fifth, the DOD's HCA program is woefully underfunded. The fiscal year 2010 OHDCA budgetary estimate, just over .05% of the DOS' 2008 total, calls into question the seriousness by which GCCs and the DOD pursue effective HCA programs. Sixth, a significant mismatch exists between the authority and capacity of both the DOS and the DOD. The DOS lacks sufficient personnel resources, number and quality, to

effectively plan and execute engagement strategies inherent to the department's responsibility for foreign policy. Seventh, the DOD – DOS interagency is fatally flawed. The DOD's and the DOS' differing organizational structures, politics, culture, policy, resources, and authorities, create a dysfunctional interagency process that allows the departments to pursue divergent objectives. In the end state, this failed process denies both the DOS and the DOD the ability to compliment one another's capabilities and resources to achieve a synergistic effect; and an opportunity is lost.

RECOMMENDATIONS

If the GCC is to leverage the capacity of HA to shape the strategic environment toward a more effective TSCP, significant changes will be required. The following recommendations, addressing both the DOD and the DOS, will improve the provision and power of HA and serve as the basis for increased efficiencies in all other DOD–DOS interagency relationships.

Resolving to control the untamed bureaucracy of the interagency process is a strategic imperative. To attain any level of success in this effort, the resource and authority imbalance must be rectified. The DOS' personnel manning must be increased to properly support the department's mission requirements. The DOS must undertake a deliberate program to qualify and maintain a cadre of DOS planners with knowledge of the DOD's capacities and organization, and the DOD should assist the DOS in this effort by providing additional allocations to the Service's Senior Service Colleges and operational planner's courses. While it is almost certain the DOS will never match the DOD's planning capacity, a core DOS planning staff would prove to be an able interagency planning partner. It is further recommended the DOD and the DOS cross-assign personnel, not as liaison, but as permanently assigned

authorizations, and then aligned them to planning and coordination functions within each department. In addition, increased coordination requirements must be given the authority of law to compel interaction. It is recommended that the law establish a three tiered (planning, midlevel and executive) joint interagency coordination board to coordinate DOS–DOD engagement efforts. In an effort to move beyond the confines of the DOD’s and the DOS’ organizational structures, the planning tier should be organized as a networked or matrix-type organization to facilitate cross-coordination. The midlevel tier should guide the efforts of the planning tier and coordinate policy. The executive tier, made up of department level decision making authorities, will serve as the decision making body. Interagency presence with the geographic combatant command’s staff must be established or increased, as the case may be, ensuring continued coordination of engagement policy at the regional level. The concept of an interagency GCC is not a new concept; the U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) is the first geographic combatant command to incorporate interagency partners within its organizational structure.⁴⁷ The U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) is planning to adopt the interagency command concept as it forms as the newest combatant command.⁴⁸ Other geographic combatant commands should follow USSOUTHCOM’s and USAFRICOM’s lead and increase interagency participation. Enhanced interagency participation within the geographic combatant command, in conjunction with the recommendations noted above, would ensure strategic to tactical interagency coordination of HA programs. While interagency participation within the geographic combatant command staff offers many potential benefits, it cannot be allowed to interfere with the GCC’s primary war fighting mission. Regardless of the level of interagency participation, a clear, unambiguous military chain of command must be maintained.

The DOD must also make changes to increase the viability of their HCA programs. The current HCA request and approval process should be completely redesigned to reduce bureaucracy and increase responsiveness. Instead of the DSCA withholding all funding approvals at their level, the GCC must be given a baseline budget and approval authority with specific spending thresholds. Funding requirements exceeding established thresholds would be forwarded to the DSCA for the necessary approvals. Any changes to policy or statute required to enact must be implemented. These changes will streamline the approval of most HCA requests while affording the GCC the flexibility and responsiveness to approve actions expeditiously. At the same time, funding for the DOD's HCA programs needs to be increased to enhance the GCC's capacity. This is not a recommendation to lift or lessen restrictions of 10 USC 401; the DOS must maintain primacy in managing U.S. assistance programs to avoid unintentional perception of the militarization of U.S. assistance programs. The GCCs should prepare and execute operational strategies for HCA programs. Projects proposed at the country team level should continue to be approved as a means of reinforcing the position of the MILGRP within the embassy and the host nation civic leaders. Additional HCA funding however, should be targeted as desired by the GCC to enhance TSCP engagement efforts. Essential to the GCC's operational strategy for HA is the development of robust public affairs (PA) program. Any efforts to streamline or enhance HA efforts will not be fully successful unless supported by a robust PA capacity. An effective PA program would increase the operational reach of HA programs to extend the potential benefits far beyond any borders.

The recommendations noted above seek to improve capacities, affix responsibility and modify existing policies to maximize resources and enhance the GCC's ability to leverage these resources in support of TSCPs. The recommendations presented are not intended to answer all

concerns; they are the first step in an iterative process that leads to greater cooperation and coordination in the pursuit of national security objectives. Low threat and cost-effective, HA, the purveyor of goodwill and trust, is a useful tool in shaping the strategic environment, and offers the GCC a unique opportunity to overcome obstacles to bilateral relationships. Lacking strategic vision, proper coordination, adequate funding, unity of effort, and encumbered by bureaucracy, HA efforts are, unfortunately, not fully leveraged in support of the GCC's TSCP. The resources and talents are readily available to overcome self-imposed barriers to an effective HA program. It's now simply a matter of leadership. There is still time to recover—the opportunity lost.

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